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COMMUNICATIONS

THE LEAGUE OF WISCONSIN MUNICIPALITIES

In 1898 the State of Wisconsin celebrated the semi-centennial anniversary of its admission to the Union. One of the features of this celebration was the meeting of various associations, and of public officials at the State Capitol. One of these was a conference of city officers. The large representation at this meeting, and the interest aroused in the discussion suggested the value and benefit to be derived from the organization of a State League of City Officers. A committee was appointed to draft a constitution, and to take the proper steps for the perfection of the organization.

The objects set forth in the prospectus were to promote the coöperation of the officials of the cities and villages of the State in all matters pertaining to municipal administration. In order to attain this purpose annual conferences were to be held, and a Central Bureau of Information was to be organized and a systematic study of legislation, which would be beneficial to the cities of the State, was to be made. The objects of the League are, thus, in brief, to promote the interests of the cities in all matters pertaining to legislation, and to the solution of specific problems of administration.

The efforts of the Association have been largely devoted to strengthening the organization along various lines in order that its influences might be felt. The first step was to secure such legislation as would enable the cities of the State to possess a uniform organization. In Wisconsin special legislation has gained such a foothold, and cities have become so individualized in organization, that it will require extraordinary efforts to get them upon a uniform basis. While upon the Statutes there exists a uniform Charter Law, its adoption is not compulsory, the necessity for adopting it is removed by the presence of a clause which permits the cities to adopt any portion of it pertaining to a given subject. This has been so generally done that the opinion seems to prevail that the general charter should be so amended as to make it a desirable instrument for all the cities instead of attempting to replace it by enacting a new charter.

The first specific step in amending the charter was to secure a uniform law making the terms of the mayors two years. At present the efforts of the League are directed towards securing legislation for a system of uniform accounting and auditing. This has already been strongly recommended by the State Tax Commission, and has found favor among men of influence. The desire for information, on the part of city officials, led to the establishment of two media for the dissemination of such information as might be desired by city officials. The first was the establishment of an organ,—*The Municipality*,—published monthly and devoted, in the main, to the discussion of current municipal problems. This publication is now in its fifth year, and has gained a place in the local field.

The second medium was the establishment of travelling Municipal Libraries. Upon the suggestion of the League this was done by the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, on lines similar to the travelling libraries so generally maintained throughout the State. It was found that the Public Library could not purchase the books that were useful for the consideration of specific municipal questions. For instance, an agitation in a given city for the ownership of some public utility demanded a literature more comprehensive than is generally found in the local library. The League has four (4) travelling libraries, passing from city to city. The libraries are composed of about fifty (50) volumes, covering those questions which are likely to arise in the smaller cities. The call for these libraries has been more gratifying than its promoters had reason to hope for. The library is left in a city about two weeks unless there are special conditions which would make it desirable for it to be assigned for a longer period.

In regard to the Annual Conferences, it has been the policy of the League to bring before the city officers men whose training entitled them to speak with authority upon those questions of general and technical interest. The result has been to stimulate the city officers to inquire more carefully into such questions and to rely more upon the advice of men of special training. Probably the greatest benefit which can be directly traced to the work of the League is the development of an active interest on the part of the city officials in the work for which they have been selected. The Conferences draw together the more progressive city officials who are desirous of familiarizing themselves with their work. The League has been in existence only a few years, but during this time has developed such strength as to make it a positive factor in legislation, and in civic improvement in general. It is making reformers of city officials without so classifying them.

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MUNICIPAL PROBLEMS IN MICHIGAN

Though the League of Michigan Municipalities was organized nearly five years ago, and has held five meetings in as many cities, its work thus far has attracted comparatively little attention in the State. But this year the League has departed from precedents and allied itself with the Michigan Political Science Association in the hope of getting the municipal problems of Michigan cities fairly before the public. Dr. John A. Fairlie, of the University of Michigan, is secretary of both organizations. He arranged for a joint conference, which was held at Ann Arbor in February, and which marks a new era in organized effort in Michigan to improve municipal conditions.

Michigan is, in many respects, a peculiar State. At the last census it had twenty-six cities with a population of more than 8,000 each, together comprising a little over 30 per cent. of the population of the State. Michigan is far enough west to indulge in the luxury of small cities. The total number of those incorporated within this State is 80, ranging in population from 513 to 285,708. Of these, 37 are incorporated under general laws governing